

Chapter 21 - Death by Cigar

Henri neared Solene, his pace unhurried. He relished watching her get all flustered with his words, words that even he himself was surprised. They spilled unchecked from his mouth, but he didn't regret actually saying them. She had to know she was safe 'from' him, 'with' him, and that he cared about her safety and happiness above all.

Gently, he ran his thumb along her cheekbones all the while she stayed glued to her seat. He saw her stiffen briefly, felt her slight discomfort, but he understood why she had these instinctual reactions. Just like him, she was new to this kind of relationship. They both needed to adjust. They both needed to take each step with caution.

He leaned a little planning to end this evening dinner with a kiss or kisses maybe, but then he noticed a shadow move in a darkened part of the mansion roof. He knew immediately what this meant.

"You must be tired," he stated, straightening his spine instead.

Solene cleared her throat and nodded. "I am, yes." The training with Anklet after all made her muscles sore. She relished in the idea of a hot bath after this.

"You may go back to your room, Solene, to rest, but remember, you are to sleep inside my chamber tonight," Henri reminded.

"Yes, I didn't forget your words this morning, Henri," she answered and stood up, masking the anxiety she suddenly felt with a neutral face.

"Good," was his remark. He strode towards the double doors and called the attention of Solene's personal maid. "Patricia, escort Lady Solene to her chamber."

The one mentioned tipped her chin down and stepped forward just as Solene entered the inner room.

Henri watched as they left, his thoughts swimming on the idea that he might have dismissed her too quickly. They could have talked more. He could have given her better attention. This was their first dinner date after all. However, he couldn't help it. There was a more pressing matter he needed to attend to.

"Report," Henri stated when he noticed a presence enter the balcony. This

presence was from the shadow on the roof earlier.

"Spectrals around the estate and active demon possessions in the nearby towns, my Lord," a man wearing a black robe and a hood informed. His head was lowered, his eyes were cast down, and he was half-kneeling on the floor, trying to look as submissive as he could.

Henri's jaw tightened upon hearing it. He turned around and cast his subordinate a glare. "Matthew, you just had to come and destroy my dinner with my bride," he stated.

"My apologies, my Lord," the man named Matthew stated.

With a sigh, Henri neared the balustrade and swept his eyes up and down and from left to right. True to Matthew's report, he could see spectrals and lost spirits everywhere. He could also sense demon possessions active nearby and there was only one reason he could think of why this was happening.

"What a bother. They are all attracted to Solene's presence," he expressed.

"They seem to have one goal in mind and it is to break through our barrier, my Lord," the man boldly pointed out. He remained in his half-kneeling position whilst he sensed the growing temper of his Master.

"One lost soul was able to pass through the barrier last night. I don't want that to happen again. Have our available Soul Collectors surround the estate," Henri stated. "We will expect more as Solene's birthday draws closer. I don't want to be complacent."

"Right away, my Lord," Matthew replied, stood up and thereafter vanished.

Henri sensed another presence enter the balcony from the inner room and he easily knew this to be Lady Ursula.

"More of this freak show as Solene's birthday nears?" she commented after puffing smoke from her cigar and joining Henri in his spot. "But wouldn't your union with her drive these demons away?"

Henri disregarded the strong smell that she brought. He just continued on staring at the floating spectrals a few meters away from the mansion's roof and stated, "Yes, but not all, Ursula. Higher-class demons, especially those who want to challenge me, would want to take advantage of this situation. They would not stop until they get a hold of my special bride."

"Oh dear," Ursula expressed with a click of her tongue, "This is one

disadvantage of marriage unique only to both of you. Are you sure you didn't regret accepting the marriage agreement? I'm sure you could just tell 'him' an alibi."

"There is no going back now, Ursula. Anyway, this is a disadvantage I am sure to welcome," Henri expressed with a confident grin. He then levitated and in a blink of an eye, disappeared in her front. She just scoffed at the show he provided.

"Show off," she muttered.

Reappearing at the very top of the roof, Henri watched as his subordinates—trained Grim Reapers of the Rantzen Clan—fought away the spectrals using their own scythes and powers.

Thinking of joining the fun, he summoned his own scythe—a whole lot bigger and sharper than the rest—and transported himself outside of the barrier...

The next morning, a vehicle arrived in the Rantzen Estate bringing with it the St. Fair family.

"Mom! AC!" Solene cried out the very moment the mother and son disembarked the van. Her smile was from ear to ear, running towards them from the entrance door of the mansion as she widely spread her arms.

"Sisi! Solene!" AC and Meridith cried out respectively.

Solene picked up the boy first and then gave her mother a tight hug.

"Ughh, I missed you guys so much!" she cried out.

From behind them, two other persons climbed down the vehicle.

"Grandma! Grandpa!" Solene exclaimed, her eyes full of mirth. They exchanged hugs too until her grandfather pulled away and asked.

"How are you doing here, Sweetie?"

"I'm doing good, pops," she answered, taking considerable effort not to look tired or sleepy. After all, she was having a hard time sleeping inside the Master's bedroom last night. At first, she felt uneasy, thinking of the many possibilities when sleeping together with her groom, but as the night got older, Henri never joined her in bed, or rather, he never showed

himself while she was there. In the end, she became worried, got intermittent sleep, and this went on until morning came.

"How was your flight?" she asked, turning her attention to her grandmother.

"A lot of turbulence, but it was manageable," Riza answered.

"Grandma, Lady Ursula told me you worked here for thirty years," Solene stated when Lady Ursula's words came to mind.

The old woman nodded and smiled proudly as her eyes wandered to the large portico they were in. "Yes, I did and it was one of the highlights of my life."

"We should go inside and talk about that then," Meredith interjected and tapped Solene's shoulder.

Together, they went inside the foyer with big smiles on their faces. Solene wanted to bring them to the dining area directly as it was already half an hour past lunch but she paused when she noticed Henri stand at the base of the stairs.

As usual, he was wearing dapper clothes with the same color motif: black. He looked unscathed, no sign of distress or fatigue on his face, and he looked freshly out from a bath. Seeing this, it made Solene feel relieved, but still, she wondered why he was absent last night.

"Welcome to the Rantzen Estate," he exclaimed with a reserved smile.

Meredith, Solene, and her grandparents exchanged glances and smiled back towards Henri's way.

"My Lord Henri," it was Riza who stepped forward first and gave the Master a slow curtsy. "It is a pleasure to meet you again."

"At ease, Ophelia," he stated.

Solene's eyebrows arched that instant. She didn't miss out on the new name Henri used to call her grandmother. As far as Solene could remember, Riza had no second name at all, so why did he call her that?

"I'm happy to complete my mission, my Lord. Solene is with you now," Riza expressed. There was pure admiration visible in the old woman's eyes and Solene was curious about it.

"Yes, you had done a good job, Ophelia. You can definitely take a breath of

relief now," Henri stated.

"That makes me so much happy, my Lord," Riza lowered her head again and thereafter returned to Solene's side.

"Lord Henri, I am charmed to finally meet you," Meridith stated, catching the Master's attention now.

"So am I, Mrs. St. Fair," he replied, tipping his head down briefly.

"I hope my daughter hasn't given you any troubles so far?" Meridith glanced at Solene and winked.

"None, Madame," Henri answered, shifting his attention to Solene with a secretive look, "Your daughter has given me nothing but pleasure."

With this, a visible blush appeared on Solene's face. They both knew that was just half the truth, but still this couldn't keep her from remembering their kisses and their sweet, short session the other night.

"Norman and Mrs. Su will take care of your needs from today onward. They will also guide you to your rooms," Henri informed. "I wish to dine with you, however, I have some urgent matters to take care of."

The St. Fair family nodded and expressed their understanding and thanks.

Once Henri left, Solene dutifully accompanied them to the dining area. They talked about many things that afternoon, but never about the secrets of the family. Solene remained patient until evening came when her mother and grandparents gathered in her room.